



*Evidence of Opotiki being  
occupied by the British Military  
as a  
result  
of  
the  
Volkner incident  
and rebel  
activity.*

# MAN AT ARMS

Capt. John Richard Rushton  
N.Z. Militia.



The Church of St Stephen, Opotiki, commenced 1862, completed 1864, for Rev. C. S. Volkner, cost £500. The following year, 1865, it was garrisoned and loopholed by the military forces. The loopholes can be seen.

WHAKATANE LIBRARIES



3 3450 00167074 2

Monograph

Number 1

1977

### Bay of Plenty Campaign

There had been confiscation of Maori lands in the Opotiki district, and a military settlement was founded under Major (later Lt.Col.) J.H.H. St.John. The latter, in his anxiety to ensure that his charge should succeed, committed some high-handed acts against civilians, such as the seizure of the cutter MARGARET for trading in what he looked upon as the exclusive preserve of his own vessel ONWARD.

Rebel activity was far from crushed, for early in 1867 there was fighting in the Rotorua/Tauranga area, and this soon spread eastward. Eru Tamaikowha te Ariari of Waimana, "the wild boar of the gorges," emerged as a guerilla leader even more troublesome than the malcontents of Opotiki in 1865. In May four men at a cabin near the Waioeka gorge were attacked and two of them, Beggs and Moore, were murdered.

A new military unit, the Opotiki Volunteer Rangers, was embodied to cope with a dangerous situation which was likely to get worse. It was commanded by Captain Henry Abbott Mair, brother of the distinguished soldiers Gilbert and William. David White was commissioned as lieutenant, while Rushton, a little younger, became ensign (subaltern).

Working up the new corps had to be on the anvil of active service, for on 21 May it formed the vanguard of St.John's thrust up the Waimana in quest of Tamaikowha. The latter was never a man to be caught napping, and at Te Pokopoko, about two miles above the town site, his Ngai-Tama and Tuhoe warriors gave the Rangers a warm reception. Fortunately only one man was wounded, by a chief of the Karake tribe who was the father of Maro te Para, or Taporangi.

Rushton shot an old chief from Maungapohatu, after which both he and Mair had to protect him from their own kupapa allies, who wanted to rob him of his greenstone tiki. It appears that David did not neglect gallantry either, being attracted to Maro te Para.

Tamaikowha was not slow in striking again. On 21 June a trader, Abraham Bennett White, and Wi Popata, a mail carrier, were riding from Whakatane to Opotiki. On fording the Waiotahi they were ambushed, killed and beheaded, the evidence of this tragedy being discovered the following morning by Waiteria, a chief returning home from a session of the land court held at Maketu.

He raised the alarm on reaching Opotiki at 11 a.m., but it was not until 4 p.m. that St.John took his men along the beach to the scene of the outrage. Being mid winter, it was dark by the time he arrived, so any search for the rebels was out of the question. After remaining under arms all night, the only practical achievement was to bring back Bennett White's head for burial. One newspaper did not mince words in castigating "the sluggishness which characterises all the movements either led or directed by Major St.John."

The Waiotahi/Ohiwa sector seemed to have an irresistible lure for the Hauhaus, for in January 1868 it was again savaged by a large war party which also laid ambushes along the sea beach, then the only real highway linking the coastal towns. St.John set out the following month to the Waimana



once again with 90 men, including the Rangers. On 10 February a skirmish occurred in which three Maoris were killed, but the arrival of enemy reinforcements soon put an end to the affair.

It was evident that more men were required if security was to be enforced. These were supplied by Major William Mair, who raised 100 Arawas, and Major J. Fraser with a division of the Armed Constabulary.

This strengthening of the defences did not deter the rebels, for in March Ohiwa suffered a new incursion. The waters of the harbour afforded no protection, an old chief being killed on Hokianga Island.

The entire force at Opotiki left in pursuit, but on 11 March the Hauhaus brought the advance to a halt at Te Ponga, far up the Waimana. A council of war was held at which each officer was asked to give his opinion, starting with Rushton as the most junior. He pointed out the strength of Tamaikowha's position, well entrenched on spurs dominating the gorge, and suggested breaking off the engagement. This view prevailed, with a retirement to Opotiki and Whakatane.

A couple of months later trouble moved nearer to Whakatane when Tamaikowha made an assault on the Ngati-Pukeko tribe, which was friendly to the Government. St. John and Fraser followed his withdrawal up the valley beyond Ruatoki, but heavy floods then drove them back without making contact.

There followed a spell of comparative peace, for Tamaikowha gave up his adventures for the time being. It was probably during these months that Maro te Para married David White, against the wishes of her people.

#### The Hunt for Te Kooti

A new Maori nationalist leader now emerged, Te Kooti Rikirangi, who had escaped from possibly unjust imprisonment in the Chatham Islands to spread fire and bloodshed through the north-east corner of the North Island.

The Tuhoe tribe, so far secure in the practically unknown hinterland of the Urewera, heeded his call, providing him with both men and a base. From this he sallied forth to attack and overwhelm the flour mill at Te Poronu, close to Whakatane, the defence of which, directed by Jean Guerrin, was one of the most heroic episodes of the war.

After this unexpected holdup, Te Kooti tried to crack another equally hard nut, Te Rauporoa, a fortified pa of the Ngati-Pukeko. While the strength of his following was bound to carry the place, its brave resistance gave time for the alarm to be raised.

From Opotiki Henry Mair brought the Rangers and some Armed Constabulary, while Gilbert made all haste from Matata to try to relieve the pa, but was met by fleeing survivors and had to fall back to the sandhills on the beach. His brother was equally powerless as he watched from the hills above Whakatane as Te Kooti swept down on the town. George Simpkins's store was looted, and the little settlement went up in flames.